

The Book of 1 Corinthians

Lesson 13: The Resurrection and Final Matters -- 1 Corinthians 15:1–16:24

Everything comes down to this. Paul has spent fifteen chapters correcting divisions, immorality, lawsuits, idol feasts, disorder in worship, and the misuse of gifts. Now, at the end, he reaches the foundation under it all, the truth without which nothing else in the letter matters: Jesus Christ really died, was really buried, and really rose again, bodily, from the dead. Some in Corinth, breathing the air of a Greek culture that found the resurrection of the body distasteful, were saying there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul will not let that stand for a moment, because if the dead are not raised, the whole house of faith collapses.

Listen to how relentlessly Paul presses it. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are found to be liars about God. You are still in your sins. Those who have died in Christ have simply perished. And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are of all people most to be pitied. He stacks up the bleak consequences one after another, and then, like sunrise breaking over all of it, comes verse 20: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” It is not a maybe. It is a fact, attested by hundreds of eyewitnesses, many still living when Paul wrote.

And because he lives, we will live. Paul calls Christ the firstfruits, the first sheaf of a harvest that guarantees the rest. He traces the great sweep of God’s plan: Christ reigning now until every enemy, including death itself, is put under his feet, and then handing the kingdom over to the Father, that God may be all in all. He describes the resurrection body, sown perishable and raised imperishable, sown in weakness and raised in power. He announces the mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, at the last trumpet. And he taunts the grave with the oldest hope of the people of God: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

Then, having lifted us to the trumpet blast and the empty grave, Paul does something beautifully practical. “Therefore,” he says, “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” The resurrection is not an escape from this life but the very reason to pour ourselves out in it. He closes the letter with instructions for the weekly collection, travel plans, and a final volley of exhortations: be watchful, stand firm in the faith, be strong, let all that you do be done in love. Read this final lesson and let the risen Christ steady you. Because the tomb is empty, your faith is not futile, your loved ones in Christ are not lost, and your labor is not in vain.

Group Discussion: Paul says that if Christ has not been raised, then “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins,” and Christians would be “of all people most to be pitied” (15:17–19). Why does Paul stake absolutely everything on the resurrection of Jesus, and what does it mean for

our faith, and our hope, that the resurrection is presented not as a comforting idea but as a historical fact?

Personal Reflection: Because Christ is risen, Paul concludes, “your labor is not in vain” (15:58). Do you actually live each day in light of the resurrection and the hope of your own, or do you mostly live as though this present life is all there is? Where would real confidence in the resurrection change the way you are living right now?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–16:24

Study Questions

1. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel he preached, “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,” and that he appeared to Cephas, the twelve, and more than five hundred at once (15:1–8). What are the essential facts of the gospel according to this passage, and why does it matter that Paul grounds them in eyewitness testimony and the Scriptures?
2. Paul says this gospel is the one “in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast” (15:1–2). Is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus truly the foundation your life stands on, or is your faith resting on something else? What would it look like to hold fast to the gospel more deliberately in this season?
3. Paul argues that “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain,” and even that those who have died in Christ “have perished” (15:13–18). Why does Paul make the resurrection of Jesus the one truth on which everything else stands or falls, and what does this teach about how central the bodily resurrection is to the Christian faith?
4. Paul says that if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are “of all people most to be pitied” (15:19), but the resurrection means our hope reaches beyond the grave. How does a real, settled hope in the resurrection change the way you face disappointment, suffering, aging, or the loss of those you love?
5. Paul declares that Christ, raised as “the firstfruits,” now reigns and “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet,” the last enemy being death, after which he delivers the kingdom “to God the Father” that God may be “all in all” (15:20–28). What does this teach about Christ reigning now, about the final defeat of death, and about the one great consummation in which Christ hands the kingdom to the Father, rather than a future earthly political reign?
6. Knowing that the risen Christ reigns even now and will finally destroy death itself, how does that present reign of King Jesus give you courage and steadiness in a world that often feels out of control? Where do you need to live this week as though Jesus is truly reigning right now?
7. Paul answers those who ask how the dead are raised by describing the resurrection body: “sown perishable,” it is “raised imperishable”; sown in weakness, raised in power; a natural body sown, a spiritual body raised, bearing “the image of the man of heaven” (15:35–49).

What does this teach about the nature of the resurrection body and about the future God has prepared for those who belong to Christ?

8. Paul says we will one day bear the image of the man of heaven, fully remade in the likeness of the risen Christ. If your body and your whole self are destined for resurrection and glory, how should that shape the way you treat your body and live your life now? Where are you investing in what is perishable rather than what is imperishable?
9. Paul reveals the mystery that “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,” when the trumpet sounds and “the dead will be raised imperishable,” so that death is “swallowed up in victory,” and he concludes, “Therefore ... be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (15:51–58). Why is the bodily resurrection of believers, like Christ’s own bodily resurrection, essential and certain rather than optional, and how does this victory over death give us reason to labor wholeheartedly for the Lord now?
10. Look back across this final lesson, and across the whole letter. Paul ends with the empty tomb, the promise of our own resurrection, and the charge to “be watchful, stand firm in the faith ... be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (16:13–14). Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Corinthians 15 and 16 that you most need to carry forward?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 11:23–27, Jesus as the resurrection and the life; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, the comfort of the resurrection at Christ’s coming; Romans 8:18–25, creation and the believer awaiting the redemption of our bodies; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, the weekly collection on the first day of the week; Philippians 3:20–21, the Savior who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body